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A HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

A Christmas Gift Basket

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Monday, December 18, 1933.

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How do you, do, everybody:

Before the time comes for another Household Calendar talk, Christmas will be here and gone. So I'm going to wish you a merry Christmas right now while I have a chance. You'll forgive me for rushing the season a little, I know.

Perhaps some of you listening in today remember that the Tuesday before Christmas last year I talked about a gift basket of food. I planned it with Dr. Hazel Stiebeling, our nutrition specialist. Our idea was to make fit something more than just a collection of foods bought hit and miss.

We thought that some of you might want to give a needy family enough food and the right kinds of food for nice, appetizing, well-balanced meals for the Christmas week-end. So we made up such a list for a family of four or five, and the cost, as we figured it, would be around two and a half or three dollars.

In a few minutes I'm going to give you the list, practically the same one as before. But first let me read you a letter that came to me a few days after Christmas last year from a listener in Genoa, Ohio.

Here's the letter: "Dear Miss Van Deman:--Your talk just before Christmas on how to prepare Christmas boxes for the "needy families" was a wonderful help to me in preparing boxes for 8 families. Our Red Cross chairman thought I had often done it before, but I explained it was my first experience. I told her the Farm and Home Hour specialist had explained to so completely that I knew just exactly what to do and how to do it. I wrote down the list just as you gave it and have it in my book for future reference. When we took the boxes around, one old lady said, 'Oh, honey.' you even brought me soap, and I do need soap so bad. Bless your dear heart for the soap."

That's all of the letter. (I wonder whether our friend in Ohio is packing the boxes for the Red Cross again this year, Here's good luck to her if she is, and also many thanks for letting us know that our plan worked.)

Now if you have a paper and pencil at hand perhaps you'll like to jot down this list. It may give you a suggestion if you're on a church or club committee to distribute food. Or perhaps somebody from the Kiwanis or the Rotary club or some other civic organization in your town would appreciate help in their Christmas plans.

The first item is evaporated milk, -- 3 tall cans. Even if the family gets fresh milk, this canned milk will keep and be ready to make hot cocoa or a good nourishing soup.

For the other dairy products to put into your gift basket, choose a half pound of cheese and a pound of butter.

Let's take the fruits and vegetables next. I'll start with potatoes, 3 or 4 pounds of sweet ones or white ones, whichever are cheapest in your locality. Then cabbage, a good firm head, the greenest you can find. Then look for bargains in vegetables and if possible choose 2 pounds or so of a yellow one, like carrots or yellow turnips. There's a close tie-up, you know, between the vitamins and the green and yellow color in vegetables.

Personally I always try to put in also a pound or so of onions, and a can or two of tomatoes. They both have so many uses intoning up low-cost meals.

For the fruits, apples are first, 2 pounds or so, and oranges, a half a dozen, and a pound of dried fruit -- prunes, raisins, dried peaches, or dried apricots, whichever you wish. We allowed also for half a pound of some inexpensive nuts for the children's stockings.

Next is the meat. Maybe you'll be able to get a nice plump hen or a duck. Or if not I know you can find a good roast of fresh pork very cheap, or a smoked shoulder, or a leg of lamb, or 3 pounds or so of beef chuck for a savory pot roast with some of the vegetables. Meat is one of the things you may have to shop around for a bit.

Let me see, eggs are next, a 1/2 dozen eggs. Then sugar, 2 pounds of sugar, and then bread and cereal. We couldn't have a well-planned basket without the good old staff of life. Make it 2 loaves of bread and a package of whole-wheat cereal or oatmeal, or if it suits your families better give the cereal in the form of flour. Also, if you can, find out whether they prefer a pound of coffee or a package of tea -- a quarter of a pound or so.

And then a cake or two of soap, don't forget it. You remember how the old lady last year about wept for joy over the soap.

That ends the list. Of course, I'd like to go right on and on with canned salmon and bananas and more fruits and vegetables and many other good foods. But few of us can give all we'd like to these days. And after all it is sometimes as the old man told Sir Lounfal in his vision. You remember the familiar lines:

"Not what we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me!"

Again, a happy Christmas to you all and good-bye for this time.